

Arts & Entertainment

Independent Thriller Concludes Filming in Scotch Plains Township

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Driving along the quiet, winding roads of Scotch Plains, you'd never suspect that a local home tucked away on a cul-de-sac was currently bustling with

police pull up and charge into the house." "Visually," Mr. Pellowski continued, "It's supposed to be your everyday 'nothing-bad-ever-happens-here' kind of house, so when something bad does happen, that adds to it."

"I think everyone will be able to relate to him (McNeil) as a victim because it's very reality-based," Mr. Aissa said. "There's really nothing far-fetched."

The crew refocuses its attention to a 40-foot camera crane, called a jib, which requires special operators. Mr. Pellowski explains that this device will be used to provide "establishing" or "bumper" shots that can be inserted at various points throughout the film.

Using this particular piece of equipment allows for creative angles that cannot be captured via regular cameras. The jib is also hooked up to a video monitor, so all could watch as the shots zoomed in sweeping along the ground, rose way up through a tree top or alternately descended upon the house.

"It really adds dynamic and ups the production value," Mr. Pellowski said.

Although they hoped to be through taking these particular shots once the sun went down, the crew had planned to continue filming overnight right through until dawn.

"This has been a very accommodating area for filming," Mr. Pellowski said. "We've come in sometimes at like 4 p.m. and worked until like 6 a.m. with lights going all night and haven't had any complaints...It's one of the few projects I've ever been on where we've almost been 100 percent on schedule day for day, hour for hour."

Rachel Marks, which additionally stars Emily Parker, Aiden Sullivan and Tempary Deckett, will be released in 2008.



Christie Storms for The Westfield Leader and The Times
I LIKE THE CUT OF HIS JIB...Red Line Studios producer Matt Pellowski pauses for a moment while a crew sets up a 40-foot jib camera crane behind him at the Scotch Plains residence featured in the film, *Rachel Marks*, an independent thriller set for release in 2008.

the Hollywood-like activity that surrounds filming a major-motion picture.

Throughout September, that private residence, along with the North Plainfield Police Station and other nearby locales, served as the setting for the independent thriller, *Rachel Marks*.

The film, which is primarily about a young woman who stalks her dentist, is the creation of writer/director and New Jersey native Jake Cashill.

His company, Fixation Films, teamed up with Red Line Studios of Brooklyn, an independent film production studio, for the project, which concluded filming last Friday.

Between takes on the front lawn of the Scotch Plains residence, Mr. Cashill spoke with *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* about why the local area was so well-suited for his production.

"I'm familiar with the area and wanted to make it community-based and use as many local elements as I could," Mr. Cashill said, citing that his parents live nearby in Plainfield.

"This has proven to be a great decision from the efficiency of logistics to the warm welcome and cooperation...Local was the way to go."

Producer Matthew Pellowski discussed the aspects that influenced selecting the Scotch Plains home.

"The interior has high ceilings and wide rooms, so that helps us with equipment," Mr. Pellowski said. "It's half in the woods, half not. There's a pond behind it, and the front yard is big enough for this scene where the

The fact the house has so many rooms allowed for the production company to use it not only as the main couple's home, but alternately as the interior of another character's apartment.

According to Mr. Pellowski, production designer Nancy Alexander currently rents the home. She helped transform its rooms to befit the characters in the movie.

"When you film in the actual location where somebody lives, there's already an environment there," Mr. Pellowski said. "I think it builds the reality of the film and helps the actors get into character more. When you're on a set, I don't think you ever get it out of your mind that you're on a set."

At dusk that day, the crew films a scene where a main character, dentist Paul McNeil, walks down his driveway. Unbeknownst to him, a stalker watches his every step from behind a tree.

Director Cashill seems to have a specific vision of how he wants this scene to play, right down to how blurry the hint of the stalker's hair appears in the corner of the screen and which direction she darts out of the frame. This requires several takes, but when the desired result is achieved, Mr. Cashill appears excited and pleased, praising the actors and crew.

Kerry Aissa, who plays McNeil and has also appeared on the television shows "The King of Queens" and "General Hospital," said he was drawn to the idea of doing a thriller and found the script to be "a great read."



Abby Ryan for The Westfield Leader and The Times
HALF-TIME HAPPINESS...Maestro David Wroe, far right, enjoys a moment of relaxation at intermission with renowned international guest soloists, from left to right, Eduardo Calcagno (Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory, Milan), Jiyeun Cholee (Seoul National Opera) and Daeson No (New York City Opera) during the Westfield Symphony Orchestra's (WSO) silver-anniversary, season-opening performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto* in concert at Summit Presbyterian Church last Friday. For more information about WSO's silver-anniversary program and upcoming concerts, call (908) 232-9400.

Symphony Teams With Renowned Soloists to Bring *Rigoletto* to Life

By JULIA BURNS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — With the start of its silver-anniversary season, the Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) began its 25th year with Verdi's *Rigoletto* last Friday, showcasing this season's theme of war and resolution. Under Maestro David Wroe, the orchestra was accompanied by a multitude of internationally renowned soloists.

Korean baritone Daeson No, playing the title role after his appearance in the WSO finale last year, artfully sang the Italian masterpiece.

However, it was the dramatic tenor of Eduardo Calcagno that really stole the show, as he portrayed the Duke of Mantua. The young Julliard-trained soprano Jiyeun Cholee of the Seoul National Opera rounded out the trio. All of their imposing voices haunted the audience of last Friday's performance.

The piece commenced with a playful melody one might expect as a theme song for a court jester. Calcagno opened the show with both a rich and romantic voice that sailed into the rafters of Central Presbyterian Church in Summit and an eyebrow raise Stephen Colbert himself would have been proud of.

However, any hints of humor or

jesting became indistinguishable once No joined Calcagno on stage.

It was those voices that captured the melodrama of *Rigoletto*'s plot. There was little visual interest for the audience until Cholee ascended the stage in a bold red chiffon dress. Her angelic voice both seamlessly captured the frustration of a daughter and truthfully interpreted the struggles of a woman.

The playful harmony between *Rigoletto* and his daughter, Gilda, was anchored in the orchestra under Maestro Wroe, who ruefully whirled his baton while artfully directing the instrumentals and Pro Arte Chorale, who have performed with the WSO previously.

Wroe's skill is apparent on stage.

25 CONTINUED: SYMPHONY

Theater Project to Present 'Dinner Party From Hell' Comedy

CRANFORD — The Theater Project, Union County College's professional theater company, located at 1033 Springfield Avenue in Cranford, will present the off-Broadway hit *Omnium Gatherum*, a dinner-party-from-hell comedy (and 2004 Pulitzer Prize finalist) by Theresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros through Sunday, October 21.

Omnium Gatherum surrounds a post-9/11 New York dinner party hosted by a domestic diva à la Martha Stewart.

The seven guests — including a middle-eastern academic, black female minister, New York City fireman, belligerent conservative novelist, gay liberal British commentator and a vegetarian feminist, as well as an eighth who arrives late — are incompatible, making for incendiary table talk.

Staged by artistic director Mark Spina, the cast includes Chess Lankford of Westfield, Shirine Babb, Rick Delaney, Gary Glor, Rebecca Moore, Kevin Sebastian, Faisal Sheikh and Harriett Trangucci.

The play was developed shortly after the terrorist attacks of 2001. In the days following 9/11, Rebeck and Gersten-Vassilaros, longtime friends,

watched hours of CNN and talked about the events and the way they were being interpreted by television's talking heads.

Soon, the heated discussions and debates between the playwrights flowed into drama, in which the Western World's intellectual elite gather at a hellish dinner party to hash out the world's problems over several cases of red and white.

Performances are Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., as well as Sundays at 3 p.m. Discussions will be held each Sunday immediately following the performance. Tickets are \$20, with student tickets priced at \$10 and \$12.

This Sunday, October 7, has been designated as "Senior Sunday," with all senior-citizen tickets available for \$12. An audio-described performance will take place today.

The New Jersey Theatre Alliance and the New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, through the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, will offer an open-captioning performance of *Omnium Gatherum* today as well.

For ticket reservations, call (908) 659-5189. For more information, visit TheTheaterProject.com.

The Theater Project is wheelchair accessible.

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